BALLADS OF A CHEECHAKO

Robert W. Service

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Ballads of a Cheechako

"Songs from Overseas"

RHYMES OF A ROLLING STONE. By ROBERT W. SERVICE.

SONGS OF A SOURDOUGH. By ROBERT W. SERVICE.

BALLADS OF A CHEECHAKO. By ROBERT W. SERVICE.

LYRA NIGERIÆ. By "ADAMU" (E. C. ADAMS).

SOUTH AFRICA, AND OTHER POEMS. By A. VINE HALL.

SONGS OUT OF EXILE (RHODESIAN RHYMES). By CULLEN GOULDSBURY.

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Ballads of a Cheechako

By

Robert W. Service

Author of
"Songs of a Sourdough"

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Ballads of a Cheechako

TO THE MAN OF THE HIGH NORTH

My rhymes are rough, and often in my rhyming
I've drifted, silver-sailed, on seas of dream,
Hearing afar the bells of Elfland chiming,
Seeing the groves of Arcadie agleam.

I was the thrall of Beauty that rejoices
From peak snow-diademed to regal star;
Yet to mine aerie ever pierced the voices,
The pregnant voices of the Things That Are.

The Here, the Now, the vast Forlorn around us;
The gold-delirium, the ferine strife;
The lusts that lure us on, the hates that hound us;
Our red rags in the patch-work quilt of Life.

The nameless men who nameless rivers travel,
And in strange valleys greet strange deaths alone;
The grim, intrepid ones who would unravel
The mysteries that shroud the Polar Zone.

These will I sing, and if one of you linger
Over my pages in the Long, Long Night,
And on some lone line lay a calloused finger,
Saying: "It's human-true—it hits me right";
Then will I count this loving toil well spent;
Then will I dream awhile—content, content.

MEN OF THE HIGH NORTH

Men of the High North, the wild sky is blazing;
Islands of opal float on silver seas;
Swift splendours kindle, barbaric, amazing;
Pale ports of amber, golden argosies.
Ringed all around us the proud peaks are glowing;
Fierce chiefs in council, their wigwam the sky;
Far, far below us the big Yukon flowing,
Like threaded quicksilver, gleams to the eye.

Men of the High North, you who have known it;
You in whose hearts its splendours have abode;
Can you renounce it, can you disown it?
Can you forget it, its glory and its goad?
Where is the hardship, where is the pain of it?
Lost in the limbo of things you've forgot;
Only remain the guerdon and gain of it;
Zest of the foray, and God, how you fought!

You who have made good, you foreign faring;
You money magic to far lands has whirled;
Can you forget those days of vast daring,
There with your soul on the Top o' the World?

Nights when no peril could keep you awake on
Spruce boughs you spread for your couch in the snow;
Taste all your feasts like the beans and the bacon
Fried at the camp-fire at forty below?

Can you remember your huskies all going,
Barking with joy and their brushes in air;
You in your parka, glad-eyed and glowing,
Monarch, your subjects the wolf and the bear?
Monarch, your kingdom unravisht and gleaming;
Mountains your throne, and a river your car;
Crash of a bull moose to rouse you from dreaming;
Forest your couch, and your candle a star.

You who this faint day the High North is luring
Unto her vastness, taintlessly sweet;
You who are steel-braced, straight-lipped, enduring,
Dreadless in danger and dire in defeat:
Honour the High North ever and ever,
Whether she crown you, or whether she slay;
Suffer her fury, cherish and love her—
He who would rule he must learn to obey.

Men of the High North, fierce mountains love you;
Proud rivers leap when you ride on their breast.

See, the austere sky, pensive above you,
Dons all her jewels to smile on your rest.
Children of Freedom, scornful of frontiers,
We who are weaklings honour your worth.
Lords of the wilderness, Princes of Pioneers,
Let's have a rouse that will ring round the earth.

THE BALLAD OF THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

One of the Down and Out—that's me. Stare at me well, ay, stare!
Stare and shrink—say! you wouldn't think that I was a millionaire.
Look at my face, it's crimped and gouged—one of them death-mask things;
Don't seem the sort of man, do I, as might be the pal of kings?
Slouching along in smelly rags, a bleary-eyed, no-good bum;
A knight of the hollow needle, pard, spewed from the sodden slum.
Look me all over from head to foot; how much would you think I was worth?
A dollar? a dime? a nickel? Why, *I'm the wealthiest man on earth.*

No, don't you think that I'm off my base. You'll sing a different tune
If only you'll let me spin my yarn. Come over to this saloon;

Wet my throat—it's as dry as chalk, and seeing as how it's you,
I'll tell the tale of a Northern trail, and so help me God, it's true.
I'll tell of the howling wilderness and the haggard Arctic heights,
Of a reckless vow that I made, and how *I staked the Northern Lights.*

Remember the year of the Big Stampede and the trail of Ninety-eight,
When the eyes of the world were turned to the North, and the hearts of men elate;
Hearts of the old dare-devil breed thrilled at the wondrous strike,
And to every man who could hold a pan came the message, "Up and hike."
Well, I was there with the best of them, and I knew I would not fail.
You wouldn't believe it to see me now; but wait till you've heard my tale.

You've read of the trail of Ninety-eight, but its woe no man may tell;
It was all of a piece and a whole yard wide, and the name of the brand was "Hell."
We heard the call and we staked our all; we were plungers playing blind,

And no man cared how his neighbour fared, and
no man looked behind;
For a ruthless greed was born of need, and the
weakling went to the wall,
And a curse might avail where a prayer would
fail, and the gold lust crazed us all.

Bold were we, and they called us three the
"Unholy Trinity";
There was Ole Olson, the Sailor Swede, and the
Dago Kid and me.
We were the discards of the pack, the foreloopers
of Unrest,
Reckless spirits of fierce revolt in the ferment of
the West.
We were bound to win and we revelled in the
hardships of the way.
We staked our ground and our hopes were
crowned, and we hoisted out the pay.
We were rich in a day beyond our dreams, it
was gold from the grass-roots down;
But we weren't used to such sudden wealth, and
there was the siren town.
We were crude and careless frontiersmen, with
much in us of the beast;
We could bear the famine worthily, but we lost
our heads at the feast.

The town looked mighty bright to us, with a bunch of dust to spend,
And nothing was half too good them days, and every one was our friend.
Wining meant more than mining then, and life was a dizzy whirl,
Gambling and dropping chunks of gold down the neck of a dance-hall girl;
Till we went clean mad, it seems to me, and we squandered our last poke,
And we sold our claim, and we found ourselves one bitter morning—broke.

The Dago Kid he dreamed a dream of his mother's aunt who died—
In the dawn-light dim she came to him, and she stood by his bedside,
And she said: "Go forth to the highest North till a lonely trail ye find;
Follow it far and trust your star, and fortune will be kind."
But I jeered at him, and then there came the Sailor Swede to me,
And he said: "I dreamed of my sister's son, who croaked at the age of three.
From the herded dead he sneaked and said: 'Seek you an Arctic trail;

'Tis pale and grim by the Polar rim, but seek and ye shall not fail.'"

And lo! that night I too did dream of my mother's sister's son,

And he said to me: "By the Arctic Sea there's a treasure to be won.

Follow and follow a lone moose trail, till you come to a valley grim,

On the slope of the lonely watershed that borders the Polar brim."

Then I woke my pals, and soft we swore by the mystic Silver Flail,

'Twas the hand of Fate, and to-morrow straight we would seek the lone moose trail.

We watched the groaning ice wrench free, crash on with a hollow din;

Men of the wilderness were we, freed from the taint of sin.

The mighty river snatched us up and it bore us swift along;

The days were bright, and the morning light was sweet with jewelled song.

We poled and lined up nameless streams, portaged o'er hill and plain;

We burnt our boat to save the nails, and built our boat again;

We guessed and groped, North, ever North, with many a twist and turn ;
We saw ablaze in the deathless days the splendid sunsets burn.
O'er soundless lakes where the grayling makes a rush at the clumsy fly ;
By bluffs so steep that the hard-hit sheep falls sheer from out the sky ;
By lilied pools where the bull moose cools and wallows in huge content ;
By rocky lairs where the pig-eyed bears peered at our tiny tent.
Through the black canyon's angry foam we hurled to dreamy bars,
And round in a ring the dog-nosed peaks bayed to the mocking stars.
Spring and summer and autumn went ; the sky had a tallow gleam,
Yet North and ever North we pressed to the land of our Golden Dream.

So we came at last to a tundra vast and dark and grim and lone ;
And there was the little lone moose trail, and we knew it for our own.
By muskeg hollow and nigger-head it wandered endlessly ;

Sorry of heart and sore of foot, weary men were we.
The short-lived sun had a leaden glare and the darkness came too soon,
And stationed there with a solemn stare was the pinched, anaemic moon.
Silence and silvern solitude till it made you dumbly shrink,
And you thought to hear with an outward ear the things you thought to think.

Oh, it was wild and weird and wan, and ever in camp o' nights
We would watch and watch the silver dance of the mystic Northern Lights.
And soft they danced from the Polar sky and swept in primrose haze;
And swift they pranced with their silver feet, and pierced with a blinding blaze.
They danced a cotillion in the sky; they were rose and silver shod;
It was not good for the eyes of man—'twas a sight for the eyes of God.
It made us mad and strange and sad, and the gold whereof we dreamed
Was all forgot, and our only thought was of the lights that gleamed.

Oh, the tundra sponge it was golden brown, and
some was a bright blood-red ;
And the reindeer moss gleamed here and there
like the tombstones of the dead.
And in and out and around about the little trail
ran clear,
And we hated it with a deadly hate and we feared
with a deadly fear.
And the skies of night were alive with light, with
a throbbing, thrilling flame ;
Amber and rose and violet, opal and gold it came.
It swept the sky like a giant scythe, it quivered
back to a wedge ;
Argently bright, it cleft the night with a wavy
golden edge.
Pennants of silver waved and streamed, lazy ban-
ners unfurled ;
Sudden splendours of sabres gleamed, lightning
javelins were hurled.
There in our awe we crouched and saw with our
wild, uplifted eyes
Charge and retire the hosts of fire in the battle-
field of the skies.

But all things come to an end at last, and the
muskeg melted away,
And frowning down to bar our path a muddle of
mountains lay.

And a gorge sheered up in granite walls, and the moose trail crept betwixt;
'Twas as if the earth had gaped too far and her stony jaws were fixt.
Then the winter fell with a sudden swoop, and the heavy clouds sagged low,
And earth and sky were blotted out in a whirl of driving snow.

We were climbing up a glacier in the neck of a mountain pass,
When the Dago Kid slipped down and fell into a deep crevasse.
When we got him out one leg hung limp, and his brow was wreathed with pain,
And he says: "'Tis badly broken, boys, and I'll never walk again.
It's death for all if ye linger here, and that's no curséd lie;
Go on, go on while the trail is good, and leave me down to die."
He raved and swore, but we tended him with our uncouth, clumsy care.
The camp-fire gleamed and he gazed and dreamed with a fixed and curious stare.
Then all at once he grabbed my gun and he put it to his head,

And he says: "I'll fix it for you, boys!"—them are the words he said.

So we sewed him up in a canvas sack and we slung him to a tree;
And the stars like needles stabbed our eyes, and woeful men were we.
And on we went on our woeful way, wrapped in a daze of dream,
And the Northern Lights in the crystal nights came forth with a mystic gleam.
They danced and they danced the devil-dance over the naked snow;
And soft they rolled like a tide upshoaled with a ceaseless ebb and flow.
They rippled green with a wondrous sheen, they fluttered out like a fan;
They spread with a blaze of rose-pink rays never yet seen of man.
They writhed like a brood of angry snakes, hissing and sulphur pale;
Then swift they changed to a dragon vast, lashing a cloven tail.
It seemed to us, as we gazed aloft with an everlasting stare,
The sky was a pit of bale and dread, and a monster revelled there.

We climbed the rise of a hog-back range that
was desolate and drear,
When the Sailor Swede had a crazy fit, and he
got to talking queer.
He talked of his home in Oregon and the peach-
trees all in bloom,
And the fern head-high, and the topaz sky, and
the forest's scented gloom.
He talked of the sins of his misspent life, and
then he seemed to brood,
And I watched him there like a fox a hare, for
I knew it was not good.
And sure enough in the dim dawn-light I missed
him from the tent,
And a fresh trail broke through the crusted snow,
and I knew not where it went.
But I followed it o'er the seamless waste, and
I found him at shut of day,
Naked there as a new-born babe—so I left him
where he lay.

Day after day was sinister, and I fought fierce-
eyed despair,
And I clung to life, and I struggled on, I knew
not why nor where.
I packed my grub in short relays, and I cowered
down in my tent,

And the world around was purged of sound like
a frozen continent.
Day after day was dark as death, but ever and
ever at nights,
With a brilliancy that grew and grew, blazed up
the Northern Lights.
They rolled around with a soundless sound like
softly bruiséd silk;
They poured into the bowl of the sky with the
gentle flow of milk.
In eager, pulsing violet their wheeling chariots
came,
Or they poised above the Polar rim like a
coronal of flame.
From depths of darkness fathomless their lancing
rays were hurled,
Like the all-combining searchlights of the navies
of the world.
There on the roof-pole of the world as one be-
witched I gazed,
And howled and grovelled like a beast as the
awful splendours blazed.
My eyes were seared, yet thralled I peered
through the parka hood nigh blind;
But I staggered on to the lights that shone, and
never I looked behind.

There is a mountain round and low that lies by the Polar rim,
And I climbed its height in a whirl of light, and I peered o'er its jaggéd brim;
And there in a crater deep and vast, ungained, unguessed of men,
The mystery of the Arctic world was flashed into my ken.
For there these poor dim eyes of mine beheld the sight of sights—
That hollow ring was the source and spring of the mystic Northern Lights.

Then I staked that place from crown to base, and I hit the homeward trail.
Ah, God! it was good, though my eyes were blurred, and I crawled like a sickly snail.
In that vast white world where the silent sky communes with the silent snow,
In hunger and cold and misery I wandered to and fro.
But the Lord took pity on my pain, and He led me to the sea,
And some ice-bound whalers heard my moan, and they fed and sheltered me.
They fed the feeble scarecrow thing that stumbled out of the wild

With the ravaged face of a mask of death and
the wandering wits of a child—
A craven, cowering bag of bones that once had
been a man.
They tended me and they brought me back to
the world, and here I am.

Some say that the Northern Lights are the glare
of the Arctic ice and snow;
And some that it's electricity, and nobody seems
to know.
But I'll tell you now—and if I lie, may my lips
be stricken dumb—
It's a *mine*, a mine of the precious stuff that men
call radium.
It's a million dollars a pound, they say, and there's
tons and tons in sight.
You can see it gleam in a golden stream in the
solitudes of night.
And it's mine, all mine—and say! if you have
a hundred plunks to spare,
I'll let you have the chance of your life, I'll sell
you a quarter share.
You turn it down? Well, I'll make it ten, seeing
as you are my friend.

Nothing doing? Say! don't be hard—have you
got a dollar to lend?
Just a dollar to help me out, I know you'll treat
me white;
I'll do as much for you some day . . . God bless
you, sir; good-night.

THE BALLAD OF THE BLACK FOX SKIN

I.

THERE was Claw-fingered Kitty and Windy Ike
living the life of shame,
When unto them in the Long, Long Night came
the man-who-had-no-name;
Bearing his prize of a black fox pelt, out of the
Wild he came.

His cheeks were blanched as the flume-head foam
when the brown spring freshets flow;
Deep in their dark, sin-calcined pits were his
sombre eyes aglow;
They knew him far for the fitful man who spat
forth blood on the snow.

"Did ever you see such a skin?" quoth he;
"there's nought in the world so fine—
Such fulness of fur as black as the night, such
lustre, such size, such shine;
It's life to a one-lunged man like me; it's London,
it's women, it's wine.

"The Moose-hides called it the devil-fox, and swore that no man could kill;
That he who hunted it, soon or late, must surely suffer some ill;
But I laughed at them and their old-squaw tales. Ha! Ha! I'm laughing still.

"For look ye, the skin—it's as smooth as sin, and black as the core of the Pit.
By gun or by trap, whatever the hap, I swore I would capture it;
By star and by star afield and afar, I hunted and would not quit.

"For the devil-fox, it was swift and sly, and it seemed to fleer at me;
I would wake in fright by the camp-fire light, hearing its evil glee;
Into my dream its eyes would gleam, and its shadow would I see.

"It sniffed and ran from the ptarmigan I had poisoned to excess;
Unharmed it sped from my wrathful lead ('twas as if I shot by guess);
Yet it came by night in the stark moonlight to mock at my weariness.

"I tracked it up where the mountains hunch like
the vertebrae of the world;
I tracked it down to the death-still pits where the
avalanche is hurled;
From the glooms to the sacerdotal snows, where
the carded clouds are curled.

"From the vastitudes where the world protrudes
through clouds like seas up-shoaled,
I held its track till it led me back to the land I
had left of old—
The land I had looted many moons. I was weary
and sick and cold.

"I was sick, soul-sick, of the futile chase, and
there and then I swore
The foul fiend fox might scathless go, for I would
hunt no more;
Then I rubbed mine eyes in a vast surprise—it
stood by my cabin door.

"A rifle raised in the wraith-like gloom, and a
vengeful shot that sped;
A howl that would thrill a cream-faced corpse—
and the demon fox lay dead. . . .
Yet there was never a sign of wound, and never
a drop he bled.

"So that was the end of the great black fox, and
here is the prize I've won;
And now for a drink to cheer me up—I've mushed
since the early sun;
We'll drink a toast to the sorry ghost of the fox
whose race is run."

II.

Now Claw-fingered Kitty and Windy Ike, bad as
the worst were they;
In their road-house down by the river-trail they
waited and watched for prey;
With wine and song they joyed night long, and
they slept like swine by day.

For things were done in the Midnight Sun that
no tongue will ever tell;
And men there be who walk earth free, but whose
names are writ in hell—
Are writ in flames with the guilty names of
Fournier and Labelle.

Put not your trust in a poke of dust would ye
sleep the sleep of sin;
For there be those who would rob your clothes
ere yet the dawn comes in;
And a prize likewise in a woman's eyes is a peer-
less black fox skin.

Put your faith in the mountain cat if you lie
within his lair;
Trust the fangs of the mother-wolf, and the claws
of the lead-ripped bear;
But oh, of the wiles and the gold-tooth smiles of
a dance-hall wench beware!

Wherefore it was beyond all laws that lusts of
man restrain,
A man drank deep and sank to sleep never to
wake again;
And the Yukon swallowed through a hole the cold
corpse of the slain.

III.

The black fox skin a shadow cast from the roof
nigh to the floor;
And sleek it seemed and soft it gleamed, and the
woman stroked it o'er;
And the man stood by with a brooding eye, and
gnashed his teeth and swore.

When thieves and thugs fall out and fight there's
fell arrears to pay;
And soon or late sin meets its fate, and so it fell
one day
That Claw-fingered Kitty and Windy Ike fanged
up like dogs at bay.

"The skin is mine, all mine," she cried; "I did
the deed alone."
"It's share and share with a guilt-yoked pair,"
he hissed in a pregnant tone;
And so they snarled like malamutes over a mil-
dewed bone.

And so they fought, by fear untaught, till haply
it befell
One dawn of day she slipped away to Dawson
town to sell
The fruit of sin, this black fox skin that had made
their lives a hell.

She slipped away as still he lay, she clutched the
wondrous fur;
Her pulses beat, her foot was fleet, her fear was
as a spur;
She laughed with glee, she did not see him rise
and follow her.

The bluffs uprear and grimly peer far over Dawson
town;
They see its lights a blaze o' nights and harshly
they look down;
They mock the plan and plot of man with grim,
ironic frown.

The trail was steep ; 'twas at the time when
swiftly sinks the snow ;
All honeycombed, the river ice was rotting down
below ;
The river chafed beneath its rind with many a
mighty throe.

And up the swift and oozy drift a woman climbed
in fear,
Clutching to her a black fox fur as if she held it
dear ;
And hard she pressed it to her breast—then Windy
Ike drew near.

She made no moan—her heart was stone—she
read his smiling face,
And like a dream flashed all her life's dark horror
and disgrace ;
A moment only—with a snarl he hurled her into
space.

She rolled for nigh an hundred feet ; she bounded
like a ball ;
From crag to crag she carromed down through
snow and timber fall ; . . .
A hole gaped in the river ice ; the spray flashed—
that was all.

A bird sang for the joy of spring, so piercing
sweet and frail;
And blinding bright the land was dight in gay
and glittering mail;
And with a wondrous black fox skin a man slid
down the trail.

IV.

A wedge-faced man there was who ran along the
river bank,
Who stumbled through each drift and slough, and
ever slipped and sank,
And ever cursed his Maker's name, and ever
"hooch" he drank.

He travelled like a hunted thing, hard harried,
sore distrest;
The old grandmother moon crept out from her
cloud-quilted nest;
The aged mountains mocked at him in their
primeval rest.

Grim shadows diapered the snow; the air was
strangely mild;
The valley's girth was dumb with mirth, the
laughter of the wild;
The still, sardonic laughter of an orge o'er a child.

The river writhed beneath the ice; it groaned
like one in pain,
And yawning chasms opened wide, and closed
and yawned again;
And sheets of silver heaved on high until they
split in twain.

From out the road-house by the trail they saw a
man afar
Make for the narrow river-reach where the swift
cross-currents are;
Where, frail and worn, the ice is torn and the
angry waters jar.

But they did not see him crash and sink into the
icy flow;
They did not see him clinging there, gripped by
the undertow,
Clawing with bleeding finger-nails at the jagged
ice and snow.

They found a note beside the hole where he had
stumbled in:
"Here met his fate by evil luck a man who lived
in sin,
And to the one who loves me least I leave this
black fox skin."

And strange it is; for, though they searched the river all around,
No trace or sign of black fox skin was ever after found;
Though one man said he saw the tread of *hoofs* deep in the ground.

THE BALLAD OF PIOUS PETE

"The North has got him."—Yukonism.

I TRIED to refine that neighbour of mine, honest to God, I did.
I grieved for his fate, and early and late I watched over him like a kid.
I gave him excuse, I bore his abuse in every way that I could ;
I swore to prevail ; I camped on his trail ; I plotted and planned for his good.
By day and by night I strove in men's sight to gather him into the fold,
With precept and prayer, with hope and despair, in hunger and hardship and cold.
I followed him into Gehennas of sin, I sat where the sirens sit ;
In the shade of the Pole, for the sake of his soul, I strove with the powers of the Pit.

I shadowed him down to the scrofulous town ; I dragged him from dissolute brawls ;
But I killed the galoot when he started to shoot electricity into my walls.
God knows what I did he should seek to be rid of one who would save him from shame.
God knows what I bore that night when he swore and bade me make tracks from his claim.
I started to tell of the horrors of hell, when sudden his eyes lit like coals ;
And "Chuck it," says he, "don't persecute me with your cant and your saving of souls."
I'll swear I was mild as I'd be with a child, but he called me the son of a slut ;
And, grabbing his gun with a leap and a run, he threatened my face with the butt.
So what could I do (I leave it to you)? With curses he harried me forth ;
Then he was alone, and I was alone, and over us menaced the North.

Our cabins were near ; I could see, I could hear ; but between us there rippled the creek ;
And all summer through, with a rancour that grew, he would pass me and never would speak.

Then a shuddery breath like the coming of Death
crept down from the peaks far away ;
The water was still ; the twilight was chill ; the
sky was a tatter of gray.
Swift came the Big Cold, and opal and gold the
lights of the witches arose ;
The frost-tyrant clinched, and the valley was
cinched by the stark and cadaverous snows.
The trees were like lace where the star-beams
could chase, each leaf was a jewel agleam.
The soft white hush lapped the Northland and
wrapped us round in a crystalline dream ;
So still I could hear quite loud in my ear the
swish of the pinions of time ;
So bright I could see, as plain as could be, the
wings of God's angels ashine.

As I read in the Book I would oftentimes look
to that cabin just over the creek.
Ah me, it was sad and evil and bad, two neigh
bours who never would speak !
I knew that full well like the devil in hell he was
hatching out, early and late,
A system to bear through the frost-spangled air
the warm, crimson waves of his hate.
I only could peer and shudder and fear—'twas
ever so ghastly and still ;

But I knew over there in his lonely despair he
was plotting me terrible ill.
I knew that he nursed a malice accurst, like the
blast of a winnowing flame;
I pleaded aloud for a shield, for a shroud—Oh,
God! then calamity came.

Mad! If I'm mad then you too are mad; but
it's all in the point of view.
If you'd looked at them things gallivantin' on
wings, all purple and green and blue;
If you'd noticed them twist, as they mounted and
hissed like scorpions dim in the dark;
If you'd seen them rebound with a horrible sound,
and spitefully spitting a spark;
If you'd watched *It* with dread, as it hissed by
your bed, that thing with the feelers that
crawls—
You'd have settled the brute that attempted to
shoot electricity into your walls.

Oh, some they were blue, and they slithered right
through; they were silent and squashy and
round;
And some they were green; they were wriggly
and lean; they writhed with so hateful a
sound.

My blood seemed to freeze ; I fell on my knees ; my face was a white splash of dread.
Oh, the Green and the Blue, they were gruesome to view ; but the worst of them all were the Red.
They came through the door, they came through the floor, they came through the moss-creviced logs.
They were savage and dire ; they were whiskered with fire ; they bickered like malamute dogs.
They ravined in rings like iniquitous things ; they gulped down the Green and the Blue.
I crinkled with fear whene'er they drew near, and nearer and nearer they drew.

And then came the crown of Horror's grim crown, the monster so loathsomely red.
Each eye was a pin that shot out and in, as, squid-like, it oozed to my bed ;
So softly it crept with feelers that swept and quivered like fine copper wire ;
Its belly was white with a sulphurous light, its jaws were a-drooling with fire.
It came and it came ; I could breathe of its flame, but never a wink could I look.
I thrust in its maw the Fount of the Law ; I fended it off with the Book.

I was weak—oh, so weak—but I thrilled at its
shriek, as wildly it fled in the night;
And deathlike I lay till the dawn of the day. (Was
ever so welcome the light?)

I loaded my gun at the rise of the sun; to his
cabin so softly I slunk.
My neighbour was there in the frost-freighted air,
all wrapped in a robe in his bunk.
It muffled his moans; it outlined his bones, as
feebly he twisted about;
His gums were so black, and his lips seemed to
crack, and his teeth all were loosening out.
'Twas a death's head that peered through the
tangle of beard; 'twas a face I will never
forget;
Sunk eyes full of woe, and they troubled me so
with their pleadings and anguish, and yet
As I rested my gaze in a misty amaze on the
scurvy-degenerate wreck,
I thought of the Things with the dragon-fly wings,
then laid I my gun on his neck.
He gave out a cry that was faint as a sigh, like a
perishing malamute,
And he says unto me, "I'm converted," says he;
"for Christ's sake, Peter, don't shoot!"

. . . .

They're taking me out with an escort about, and
under a sergeant's care ;
I am humbled indeed, for I'm 'cuffed to a Swede
that thinks he's a millionaire.
But it's all Gospel true what I'm telling to you—
up there where the Shadow falls—
That I settled Sam Noot when he started to shoot
electricity into my walls.

THE BALLAD OF BLASPHEMOUS BILL

I took a contract to bury the body of blasphemous
Bill MacKie,
Whenever, wherever or whatsoever the manner of
death he die—
Whether he die in the light o' day or under the
peak-faced moon ;
In cabin or dance-hall, camp or dive, mucklucks
or patent shoon ;
On velvet tundra or virgin peak, by glacier, drift
or draw ;
In muskeg hollow or canyon gloom, by avalanche,
fang or claw ;
By battle, murder or sudden wealth, by pestilence,
hooch or lead—
I swore on the Book I would follow and look till
I found my tombless dead.

For Bill was a dainty kind of cuss, and his mind
was mighty sot

On a dinky patch with flowers and grass in a civilised bone-yard lot.
And where he died or how he died, it didn't matter a damn
So long as he had a grave with frills and a tomb-stone "epigram."
So I promised him, and he paid the price in good cheechako coin
(Which the same I blowed in that very night down in the Tenderloin).
Then I painted a three-foot slab of pine: "Here lies poor Bill MacKie,"
And I hung it up on my cabin wall and I waited for Bill to die.

Years passed away, and at last one day came a squaw with a story strange,
Of a long-deserted line of traps 'way back of the Bighorn range;
Of a little hut by the great divide, and a white man stiff and still,
Lying there by his lonesome self, and I figured it must be Bill.
So I thought of the contract I'd made with him, and I took down from the shelf
The swell black box with the silver plate he'd picked out for hisself;

And I packed it full of grub and "hooch," and I slung it on the sleigh ;
Then I harnessed up my team of dogs and was off at dawn of day.

You know what it's like in the Yukon wild when it's sixty-nine below ;
When the ice-worms wriggle their purple heads through the crust of the pale blue snow ;
When the pine-trees crack like little guns in the silence of the wood,
And the icicles hang down like tusks under the parka hood ;
When the stove-pipe smoke breaks sudden off, and the sky is weirdly lit,
And the careless feel of a bit of steel burns like a red-hot spit ;
When the mercury is a frozen ball, and the frost-fiend stalks to kill—
Well, it was just like that that day when I set out to look for Bill.

Oh, the awful hush that seemed to crush me down on every hand,
As I blundered blind with a trail to find through that blank and bitter land ;

Half dazed, half crazed in the winter wild, with its
grim heart-breaking woes,
And the ruthless strife for a grip on life that only
the sourdough knows!
North by the compass, North I pressed; river and
peak and plain
Passed like a dream I slept to lose and I waked
to dream again.

River and plain and mighty peak—and who could
stand unawed?
As their summits blazed, he could stand undazed
at the foot of the throne of God.
North, aye, North, through a land accurst, shunned
by the scouring brutes,
And all I heard was my own harsh word and the
whine of the malamutes,
Till at last I came to a cabin squat, built in the
side of a hill,
And I burst in the door, and there on the floor,
frozen to death, lay Bill.

Ice, white ice, like a winding-sheet, sheathing each
smoke-grimed wall;
Ice on the stove-pipe, ice on the bed, ice gleaming
over all;

Sparkling ice on the dead man's chest, glittering
ice in his hair,
Ice on his fingers, ice in his heart, ice in his
glassy stare;
Hard as a log and trussed like a frog, with his
arms and legs outspread.
I gazed at the coffin I'd brought for him, and I
gazed at the gruesome dead,
And at last I spoke: "Bill liked his joke; but
still, goldarn his eyes,
A man had ought to consider his mates in the way
he goes and dies."

Have you ever stood in an Arctic hut in the shadow
of the Pole,
With a little coffin six by three and a grief you
can't control?
Have you ever sat by a frozen corpse that looks
at you with a grin,
And that seems to say: "You may try all day, but
you'll never jam me in?"
I'm not a man of the quitting kind, but I never
felt so blue
As I sat there gazing at that stiff and studying
what I'd do.

Then I rose and I kicked off the husky dogs that
were nosing round about,
And I lit a roaring fire in the stove, and I started
to thaw Bill out.

Well, I thawed and thawed for thirteen days but
it didn't seem no good ;
His arms and legs stuck out like pegs, as if they
was made of wood.
Till at last I said : "It ain't no use—he's froze too
hard to thaw ;
He's obstinate, and he won't lie straight, so I guess
I got to—*saw*."
So I sawed off poor Bill's arms and legs, and I
laid him snug and straight
In the little coffin he picked hisself, with the dinky
silver plate ;
And I came nigh near to shedding a tear as I
nailed him safely down ;
Then I stowed him away in my Yukon sleigh, and
I started back to town.

So I buried him as the contract was in a narrow
grave and deep,
And there he's waiting the Great Clean-up, when
the Judgment sluice-heads sweep ;

And I smoke my pipe and I meditate in the light
of the Midnight Sun,
And sometimes I wonder if they *was*, the awful
things I done.
And as I sit and the parson talks, expounding of
the Law,
I often think of poor old Bill—*and how hard he was*
to saw.

THE BALLAD OF ONE-EYED MIKE

This is the tale that was told to me by the man with the crystal eye,
As I smoked my pipe in the camp-fire light, and the Glories swept the sky;
As the Northlights gleamed and curved and streamed, and the bottle of "hooch" was dry.

A man once aimed that my life be shamed, and wrought me a deathly wrong;
I vowed one day I would well repay, but the heft of his hate was strong.
He thonged me East and he thonged me West; he harried me back and forth,
Till I fled in fright from his peerless spite to the bleak, bald-headed North.

And there I lay, and for many a day I hatched plan after plan,
For a golden haul of the wherewithal to crush and to kill my man;

And there I strove, and there I clove through the drift of icy streams ;
And there I fought, and there I sought for the pay-streak of my dreams.

So twenty years, with their hopes and fears and smiles and tears and such,
Went by and left me long bereft of hope of the Midas touch ;
About as fat as a chancel rat, and lo ! despite my will,
In the weary fight I had clean lost sight of the man I sought to kill.

'Twas so far away, that evil day when I prayed the Prince of Gloom
For the savage strength and the sullen length of life to work his doom.
Nor sign nor word had I seen or heard, and it happed so long ago ;
My youth was gone and my memory wan, and I willed it even so.

It fell one night in the waning light by the Yukon's oily flow,
I smoked and sat as I marvelled at the sky's port-winey glow ;

Till it paled away to an absinthe gray, and the river seemed to shrink,
All wobbly flakes and wriggling snakes and goblin eyes a-wink.

'Twas weird to see and it 'wildered me in a queer, hypnotic dream,
Till I saw a spot like an inky blot come floating down the stream;
It bobbed and swung; it sheered and hung; it romped round in a ring;
It seemed to play in a tricksome way; it sure was a merry thing.

In freakish flights strange oily lights came fluttering round its head,
Like butterflies of a monster size—then I knew it for the Dead.
Its face was rubbed and slicked and scrubbed as smooth as a shaven pate;
In the silver snakes that the water makes it gleamed like a dinner-plate.

It gurgled near, and clear and clear and large and large it grew;
It stood upright in a ring of light and it looked me through and through.

It weltered round with a woozy sound, and ere I could retreat,
With the witless roll of a sodden soul it wantoned to my feet.

And here I swear by this Cross I wear, I heard that "floater" say :
"I am the man from whom you ran, the man you sought to slay.
That you may note and gaze and gloat, and say 'Revenge is sweet,'
In the grit and grime of the river's slime I am rotting at your feet.

"The ill we rue we must e'en undo, though it rive us bone from bone ;
So it came about that I sought you out, for I prayed I might atone.
I did you wrong, and for long and long I sought where you might live ;
And now you're found, though I'm dead and drowned, I beg you to forgive."

So sad it seemed, and its cheek-bones gleamed, and its fingers flicked the shore ;
And it lapped and lay in a weary way, and its hands met to implore ;

That I gently said: "Poor, restless dead, I would never work you woe;
Though the wrong you rue you can ne'er undo, I forgave you long ago."

Then, wonder-wise, I rubbed my eyes and I woke from a horrid dream.
The moon rode high in the naked sky, and something bobbed in the stream.
It held my sight in a patch of light, and then it sheered from the shore;
It dipped and sank by a hollow bank, and I never saw it more.

This was the tale he told to me, that man so warped and gray,
Ere he slept and dreamed, and the camp-fire gleamed in his eye in a wolfish way—
That crystal eye that raked the sky in the weird Auroral ray.

THE BALLAD OF THE BRAND

'Twas up in a land long famed for gold, where women were far and rare,
Tellus, the smith, had taken to wife a maiden amazingly fair ;
Tellus, the brawny worker in iron, hairy and heavy of hand,
Saw her and loved her and bore her away from the tribe of a Southern land ;
Deeming her worthy to queen his home and mother him little ones,
That the name of Tellus, the master smith, might live in his stalwart sons.

Now there was little of law in the land, and evil doings were rife,
And every man who joyed in his home guarded the fame of his wife ;
For there were those of the silver tongue and the honeyed art to beguile,

Who would cozen the heart from a woman's
breast and damn her soul with a smile.
And there were women too quick to heed a look
or a whispered word,
And once in a while a man was slain, and the
ire of the King was stirred;
So far and wide he proclaimed his wrath, and
this was the law he willed:
"That whosoever killeth a man, even shall he be
killed."

Now Tellus, the smith, he trusted his wife; his
heart was empty of fear.
High on the hill was the gleam of their hearth, a
beacon of love and cheer.
High on the hill they builded their bower, where
the broom and the bracken meet;
Under a grave of oaks it was, hushed and
drowsily sweet.
Here he enshrined her, his dearest saint, his idol,
the light of his eye;
Her kisses rested upon his lips as brushes a
butterfly.
The weight of her arms around his neck was
light as the thistle down;
And sweetly she studied to win his smile, and
gently she mocked his frown.

And when at the close of the dusty day his clangorous toil was done,
She hastened to meet him down the way all lit by the amber sun.
Their dove-cot gleamed in the golden light, a temple of stainless love;
Like the hanging cup of a big blue flower was the topaz sky above.
The roses and lilies yearned to her, as swift through their throng she pressed;
A little white, fragile, fluttering thing that lay like a child on his breast.
Then the heart of Tellus, the smith, was proud, and sang for the joy of life,
And there in the bronzing summertide he thanked the gods for his wife.

Now there was one called Philo, a scribe, a man of exquisite grace,
Carved like the god Apollo in limb, fair as Adonis in face;
Eager and winning of manner, full of such radiant charm,
Womenkind fought for his favour and loved to their uttermost harm.
Such was his craft and his knowledge, such was his skill at the game,

Never was woman could flout him, so be he plotted her shame.
And so he drank deep of pleasure, and then it fell on a day
He gazed on the wife of Tellus and marked her out for his prey.

Tellus, the smith, was merry, and the time of the year it was June,
So he said to his stalwart helpers: "Shut down the forge at noon.
Go ye and joy in the sunshine, rest in the coolth of the grove,
Drift on the dreamy river, every man with his love."
Then to himself: "Oh, Beloved, sweet will be your surprise;
To-day will we sport like children, laugh in each other's eyes;
Weave gay garlands of poppies, crown each other with flowers,
Pull plump carp from the lilies, rifle the ferny bowers.
To-day with feasting and gladness the wine of Cyprus will flow;
To-day is the day we were wedded only a twelvemonth ago."

The larks trilled high in the heavens; his heart
was lyric with joy;
He plucked a posy of lilies; he sped like a love-
sick boy.
He stole up the velvety pathway—his cottage was
sunsteeped and still;
Vines honeysuckled the window; softly he peeped
o'er the sill.
The lilies dropped from his fingers; devils were
choking his breath;
Rigid with horror, he stiffened; ghastly his face
was as death.
Like a nun whose faith in the Virgin is met with
a prurient jibe,
He shrank—'twas the wife of his bosom in the
arms of Philo, the scribe.

Tellus went back to his smithy; he reeled like a
drunken man;
His heart was riven with anguish; his brain was
brooding a plan.
Straight to his anvil he hurried; started his
furnace aglow;
Heated his iron and shaped it with savage and
masterful blow.

Sparks showered over and round him; swiftly under his hand
There at last it was finished—a hideous and infamous Brand.

That night the wife of his bosom, the light of joy in her eyes,
Kissed him with words of rapture; but he knew that her words were lies.
Never was she so beguiling, never so merry of speech
(For passion ripens a woman as the sunshine ripens a peach).
He clenched his teeth into silence; he yielded up to her lure,
Though he knew that her breasts were heaving from the fire of her paramour.
"To-morrow," he said, "to-morrow"—he wove her hair in a strand,
Twisted it round his fingers and smiled as he thought of the Brand.

The morrow was come, and Tellus swiftly stole up the hill.
Butterflies drowsed in the noon-heat; coverts were sunsteeped and still.

Softly he padded the pathway unto the porch, and within
Heard he the low laugh of dalliance, heard he the rapture of sin.
Knew he her eyes were mystic with light that no man should see,
No man kindle and joy in, no man on earth save he.
And never for him would it kindle. The blood-lust surged in his brain ;
Through the senseless stone could he see them, wanton and warily fain.
Horrible ! Heaven he sought for, gained it and gloried and fell—
Oh, it was sudden—headlong into the nethermost hell. . . .

Was this he, Tellus, this marble ? Tellus . . . not dreaming a dream ?
Ah ! sharp-edged as a javelin, was that a woman's scream ?
Was it a door that shattered, shell-like, under his blow ?
Was it his saint, that strumpet, dishevelled and cowering low ?
Was it her lover, that wild thing, that twisted and gouged and tore ?

Was it a man he was crushing, whose head he beat on the floor?
Laughing the while at its weakness, till sudden he stayed his hand—
Through the red ring of his madness flamed the thought of the Brand.

Then bound he the naked Philo with thongs that cut in the flesh,
And the wife of his bosom, fear-frantic, he gagged with a silken mesh,
Choking her screams into silence; bound her down by the hair;
Dragged her lover unto her under her frenzied stare.
In the heat of the hearth-fire embers he heated the hideous Brand;
Twisting her fingers open, he forced its haft in her hand.
He pressed it downward and downward; she felt the living flesh sear;
She saw the throe of her lover; she heard the scream of his fear.
Once, twice and thrice he forced her, heedless of prayer and shriek—
Once on the forehead of Philo, twice in the soft of his cheek.

Then (for the thing was finished) he said to the woman: "See
How you have branded your lover! Now will I let him go free."
He severed the thongs that bound him, laughing: "Revenge is sweet,"
And Philo, sobbing in anguish, feebly rose to his feet.
The man who was fair as Apollo, god-like in woman's sight,
Hideous now as a satyr, fled to the pity of night.

Then came they before the Judgment Seat, and thus spoke the Lord of the Land:
"He who seeketh his neighbour's wife shall suffer the doom of the Brand.
Brutish and bold on his brow be it stamped, deep in his cheek let it sear,
That every man may look on his shame, and shudder and sicken and fear.
He shall hear their mock in the market-place, their fleering jibe at the feast,
He shall seek the caves and the shroud of night, and the fellowship of the beast.
Outcast forever from homes of men, far and far shall he roam.
Such be the doom, sadder than death, of him who shameth a home."

THE BALLAD OF HARD-LUCK HENRY

Now wouldn't you expect to find a man an awful crank
That's staked out nigh three hundred claims, and every one a blank;
That's followed every fool stampede, and seen the rise and fall
Of camps where men got gold in chunks and he got none at all;
That's prospected a bit of ground and sold it for a song
To see it yield a fortune to some fool that came along;
That's sunk a dozen bed-rock holes, and not a speck in sight,
Yet sees them take a million from the claims to left and right?
Now aren't things like that enough to drive a man to booze?
But Hard-Luck Smith was hoodoo-proof—he knew the way to lose.

'Twas in the fall of nineteen four—leap-year I've heard them say—
When Hard-Luck came to Hunker Creek and took a hillside lay.
And lo! as if to make amends for all the futile past,
Late in the year he struck it rich, the real pay-streak at last.
The riffles of his sluicing-box were choked with speckled earth,
And night and day he worked that lay for all that he was worth.
And when in chill December's gloom his lucky lease expired,
He found that he had made a stake as big as he desired.

One day while meditating on the waywardness of fate,
He felt the ache of lonely man to find a fitting mate;
A petticoated pard to cheer his solitary life,
A woman with soft, soothing ways, a confidant, a wife.
And while he cooked his supper on his little Yukon stove,

He wished that he had staked a claim in Love's
rich treasure-trove ;
When suddenly he paused and held aloft a Yukon
egg,
For there in pencilled letters was the magic name
of Peg.

You know these Yukon eggs of ours—some pink,
some green, some blue—
A dollar per, assorted tints, assorted flavours too.
The supercilious cheechako might designate them
high,
But one acquires a taste for them and likes them
by-and-by.
Well, Hard-Luck Henry took this egg and held it
to the light,
And there was more faint pencilling that sorely
taxed his sight.
At last he made it out, and then the legend ran
like this—
"Will Klondike miner write to Peg, Plumhollow,
Squashville, Wis.?"

That night he got to thinking of this far-off, un-
known fair ;
It seemed so sort of opportune, an answer to his
prayer.

She flitted sweetly through his dreams, she haunted
him by day,
She smiled through clouds of nicotine, she cheered
his weary way.
At last he yielded to the spell ; his course of love
he set—
Wisconsin his objective point ; his object, Margaret.

With every mile of sea and land his longing grew
and grew.
He practised all his pretty words, and these, I
fear, were few.
At last, one frosty evening, with a cold chill down
his spine,
He found himself before her house, the threshold
of the shrine.
His courage flickered to a spark, then glowed
with sudden flame—
He knocked ; he heard a welcome word ; she
came—his goddess came.
Oh, she was fair as any flower, and huskily he spoke :
" I'm all the way from Klondike, with a mighty
heavy poke.
I'm looking for a lassie, one whose Christian name
is Peg,
Who sought a Klondike miner, and who wrote it
on an egg."

The lassie gazed at him a space, her cheeks grew rosy red ;
She gazed at him with tear-bright eyes, then tenderly she said :
" Yes, lonely Klondike miner, it is true my name is Peg.
It's also true I longed for you and wrote it on an egg.
My heart went out to some one in that land of night and cold ;
But oh, I fear that Yukon egg must have been mighty old.
I waited long, I hoped and feared ; you should have come before ;
I've been a wedded woman now for eighteen months or more.
I'm sorry, since you've come so far, you ain't the one that wins ;
But won't you take a step inside—*I'll let you see the twins.*"

THE MAN FROM ELDORADO

I

He's the man from Eldorado, and he's just arrived in town,
In moccasins and oily buckskin shirt.
He's gaunt as any Indian, and pretty nigh as brown;
He's greasy, and he smells of sweat and dirt.
He sports a crop of whiskers that would shame a healthy hog;
Hard work has racked his joints and stooped his back;
He slops along the sidewalk followed by his yellow dog,
But he's got a bunch of gold-dust in his sack.

He seems a little wistful as he blinks at all the lights,
And maybe he is thinking of his claim

And the dark and dwarfish cabin where he lay
and dreamed at nights,
(Thank God, he'll never see the place again !)
Where he lived on tinned tomatoes, beef em-
balmed and sourdough bread,
On rusty beans and bacon furred with mould ;
His stomach's out of kilter and his system full of
lead,
But it's over, and his poke is full of gold.

He has panted at the windlass, he has loaded in
the drift,
He has pounded at the face of oozy clay ;
He has taxed himself to sickness, dark and damp
and double shift,
He has laboured like a demon night and day.
And now, praise God, it's over, and he seems to
breathe again
Of new-mown hay, the warm, wet, friendly loam ;
He sees a snowy orchard in a green and dimpling
plain,
And a little vine-clad cottage, and it's—Home.

II.

He's the man from Eldorado, and he's had a bite
and sup,
And he's met in with a drouthy friend or two ;

He's cached away his gold-dust, but he's sort of bucking up,
So he's kept enough to-night to see him through.
His eye is bright and genial, his tongue no longer lags;
His heart is brimming o'er with joy and mirth;
He may be far from savoury, he may be clad in rags,
But to-night he feels as if he owns the earth.

Says he: "Boys, here is where the shaggy North and I will shake;
I thought I'd never manage to get free.
I kept on making misses; but at last I've got my stake;
There's no more thawing frozen muck for me.
I am going to God's Country, where I'll live the simple life;
I'll buy a bit of land and make a start;
I'll carve a little homestead, and I'll win a little wife,
And raise ten little kids to cheer my heart."

They signified their sympathy by crowding to the bar;
They bellied up three deep and drank his health.

He shed a radiant smile around and smoked a rank cigar ;
They wished him honour, happiness and wealth.
They drank unto his wife to be—that unsuspecting maid ;
They drank unto his children half a score ;
And when they got through drinking, very tenderly they laid
The man from Eldorado on the floor.

III.

He's the man from Eldorado, and he's only starting in
To cultivate a thousand-dollar jag.
His poke is full of gold-dust and his heart is full of sin,
And he's dancing with a girl called Muckluck Mag.
She's as light as any fairy ; she's as pretty as a peach ;
She's mistress of the witchcraft to beguile ;
There's sunshine in her manner, there is music in her speech,
And there's concentrated honey in her smile.

Oh, the fever of the dance-hall and the glitter and the shine,
The beauty, and the jewels, and the whirl,

The madness of the music, the rapture of the wine,
The languorous allurement of a girl!
She is like a lost madonna; he is gaunt, unkempt and grim;
But she fondles him and gazes in his eyes;
Her kisses seek his heavy lips, and soon it seems to him
He has staked a little claim in Paradise.

"Who's for a juicy two-step?" cries the master of the floor;
The music throbs with soft, seductive beat.
There's glitter, gilt and gladness; there are pretty girls galore;
There's a woolly man with moccasins on feet.
They know they've got him going; he is buying wine for all;
They crowd around as buzzards at a feast,
Then when his poke is empty they boost him from the hall,
And spurn him in the gutter like a beast.

He's the man from Eldorado, and he's painting red the town;
Behind he leaves a trail of yellow dust;

In a whirl of senseless riot he is ramping up and down;
There's nothing checks his madness and his lust.
And soon the word is passed around—it travels like a flame;
They fight to clutch his hand and call him friend,
The chevaliers of lost repute, the dames of sorry fame;
Then comes the grim awakening—the end.

IV.

He's the man from Eldorado, and he gives a grand affair;
There's feasting, dancing, wine without restraint.
The smooth Beau Brummels of the bar, the faro men, are there;
The tinhorns and purveyors of red paint;
The sleek and painted women, their predacious eyes aglow—
Sure Klondike City never saw the like;
Then Muckluck Mag proposed the toast, "The giver of the show,
The livest sport that ever hit the pike."

The "live one" rises to his feet; he stammers to reply—
And then there comes before his muddled brain

A vision of green vastitudes beneath an April sky,
And clover pastures drenched with silver rain.
He knows that it can never be, that he is down and out;
Life leers at him with foul and fetid breath;
And then amid the revelry, the song and cheer and shout,
He suddenly grows grim and cold as death.

He grips the table tensely, and he says: "Dear friends of mine,
I've let you dip your fingers in my purse;
I've crammed you at my table, and I've drowned you in my wine,
And I've little left to give you but—my curse.
I've failed supremely in my plans; it's rather late to whine;
My poke is mighty weasened up and small.
I thank you each for coming here; the happiness is mine—
And now, you thieves and harlots, take it all."

He twists the thong from off his poke; he swings it o'er his head;
The nuggets fall around their feet like grain.

They rattle over roof and wall; they scatter, roll
and spread;
The dust is like a shower of golden rain.
The guests a moment stand aghast, then grovel on
the floor;
They fight, and snarl, and claw, like beasts of
prey;
And then, as everybody grabbed and everybody
swore,
The man from Eldorado slipped away.

v.

He's the man from Eldorado, and they found him
stiff and dead,
Half covered by the freezing ooze and dirt.
A clotted Colt was in his hand, a hole was in his
head,
And he wore an old and oily buckskin shirt.
His eyes were fixed and horrible, as one who
hails the end;
The frost had set him rigid as a log;
And there, half lying on his breast, his last and
only friend,
There crouched and whined a mangy yellow
dog.

MY FRIENDS

THE man above was a murderer, the man below
was a thief;
And I lay there in the bunk between, ailing
beyond belief;
A weary armful of skin and bone, wasted with
pain and grief.

My feet were froze, and the lifeless toes were
purple and green and gray;
The little flesh that clung to my bones, you could
punch it in holes like clay;
The skin on my gums was a sullen black, and
slowly peeling away.

I was sure enough in a direful fix, and often I
wondered why
They did not take the chance that was left and
leave me alone to die,
Or finish me off with a dose of dope—so utterly
lost was I.

But no; they brewed me the green-spruce tea,
and nursed me there like a child;
And the homicide he was good to me, and bathed
my sores and smiled;
And the thief he starved that I might be fed, and
his eyes were kind and mild.

Yet they were woefully wicked men, and often at
night in pain
I heard the murderer speak of his deed and dream
it over again;
I heard the poor thief sorrowing for the dead self
he had slain.

I'll never forget that bitter dawn, so evil, askew
and gray,
When they wrapped me round in the skins of
beasts and they bore me to a sleigh,
And we started out with the nearest post an
hundred miles away.

I'll never forget the trail they broke, with its
tense, unuttered woe;
And the crunch, crunch, crunch, as their snow-
shoes sank through the crust of the hollow
snow;
And my breath would fail, and every beat of my
heart was like a blow.

And oftentimes I would die the death, yet wake
up to life anew ;
The sun would be all ablaze on the waste, and the
sky a blighting blue,
And the tears would rise in my snow-blind eyes
and furrow my cheeks like dew.

And the camps we made when their strength out-
played and the day was pinched and wan ;
And oh, the joy of that blessed halt, and how I
did dread the dawn ;
And how I hated the weary men who rose and
dragged me on.

And oh, how I begged to rest, to rest—the snow
was so sweet a shroud ;
And oh, how I cried when they urged me on, cried
and cursed them aloud ;
Yet on they strained, all racked and pained, and
sorely their backs were bowed.

And then it was all like a lurid dream, and I
prayed for a swift release
From the ruthless ones who would not leave me
to die alone in peace ;
Till I wakened up and I found myself at the post
of the Mounted Police.

And there was my friend the murderer, and there
was my friend the thief,
With bracelets of steel around their wrists, and
wicked beyond belief:
But when they come to God's judgment seat—
may I be allowed the brief.

THE PROSPECTOR

I STROLLED up old Bonanza, where I staked in Ninety-eight,
A-purpose to revisit the old claim.
I kept thinking mighty sadly of the funny ways of Fate,
And the lads who once were with me in the game.
Poor boys, they're down-and-outers, and there's scarcely one to-day
Can show a dozen colours in his poke ;
And me, I'm still prospecting, old and battered, gaunt and gray,
And I'm looking for a grub-stake, and I'm broke.

I strolled up old Bonanza. The same old moon looked down ;
The same old landmarks seemed to yearn to me ;

But the cabins all were silent, and the flat, once
like a town,
Was mighty still and lonesome-like to see.
There were piles and piles of tailings where we
toiled with pick and pan,
And turning round a bend I heard a roar,
And there a giant gold-ship of the very newest
plan
Was tearing chunks of pay-dirt from the shore.

It wallowed in its water-bed; it burrowed, heaved
and swung;
It gnawed its way ahead with grunts and sighs;
Its bill of fare was rock and sand; the tailings
were its dung;
It glared around with fierce electric eyes.
Full fifty buckets crammed its maw; it bellowed
out for more;
It looked like some great monster in the gloom.
With two to feed its sateless greed, it worked for
seven score,
And I sighed: "Ah, old-time miner, here's your
doom!"

The idle windlass turns to rust; the sagging sluice-
box falls;
The holes you digged are water to the brim;

Your little sod-roofed cabins with the snugly moss-chinked walls
Are deathly now and mouldering and dim.
The battle-field is silent where of old you fought it out;
The claims you fiercely won are lost and sold;
But there's a little army that they'll never put to rout—
The men who simply live to seek the gold.

The men who can't remember when they learned to swing a pack,
Or in what lawless land the quest began;
The solitary seeker with his grub-stake on his back
The restless buccaneer of pick and pan.
On the mesas of the Southland, on the tundras of the North,
You will find us, changed in face but still the same;
And it isn't need, it isn't greed that sends us faring forth—
It's the fever, it's the glory of the game.

For once you've panned the speckled sand and seen the bonny dust,
Its peerless brightness blinds you like a spell;

It's little else you care about ; you go because you must,
And you feel that you could follow it to hell.
You'd follow it in hunger, and you'd follow it in cold ;
You'd follow it in solitude and pain ;
And when you're stiff and battened down let some one whisper "Gold,"
You're lief to rise and follow it again.

Yet look you, if I find the stuff it's just like so much dirt ;
I fling it to the four winds like a child.
It's wine and painted women and the things that do me hurt,
Till I crawl back, beggared, broken, to the Wild.
Till I crawl back, sapped and sodden, to my grub-stake and my tent—
There's a city, there's an army (hear them shout).
There's the gold in millions, millions, but I haven't got a cent ;
And oh, it's me, it's me that found it out.

It was my dream that made it good, my dream that made me go
To lands of dread and death disprized of man ;

But oh, I've known a glory that their hearts will never know,
When I picked the first big nugget from my pan.
It's still my dream, my dauntless dream, that drives me forth once more
To seek and starve and suffer in the Vast;
That heaps my heart with eager hope, that glimmers on before—
My dream that will uplift me to the last.

Perhaps I am stark crazy, but there's none of you too sane;
It's just a little matter of degree.
My hobby is to hunt out gold; it's fortressed in my brain;
It's life and love and wife and home to me.
And I'll strike it, yes, I'll strike it; I've a hunch I cannot fail;
I've a vision, I've a prompting, I've a call;
I hear the hoarse stampeding of an army on my trail,
To the last, the greatest gold camp of them all.

Beyond the shark-tooth ranges sawing savage at the sky
There's a lowering land no white man ever struck;

There's gold, there's gold in millions, and I'll find
it if I die,
And I'm going there once more to try my luck.
Maybe I'll fail—what matter? It's a mandate, it's
a vow;
And when in lands of dreariness and dread
You seek the last lone frontier, far beyond your
frontiers now,
You will find the old prospector, silent, dead.

You will find a tattered tent-pole with a ragged robe
below it;
You will find a rusted gold-pan on the sod;
You will find the claim I'm seeking, with my bones
as stakes to show it;
But I've sought the last Recorder, and He's—God.

THE BLACK SHEEP

"The aristocratic ne'er-do-well in Canada frequently finds his way into the ranks of the Royal North-West Mounted Police."—*Extract.*

Hark to the ewe that bore him:
"What has muddied the strain?
Never his brothers before him
Showed the hint of a stain."
Hark to the tups and wethers;
Hark to the old gray ram:
"We're all of us white, but he's black as night,
And he'll never be worth a damn."

I'm up on the bally wood-pile at the back of the barracks yard;
"A damned disgrace to the force, sir," with a comrade standing guard;
Making the bluff I'm busy, doing my six months' hard.

"Six months' hard and dismissed, sir." Isn't that
rather hell?
And all because of the liquor laws and the wiles
of a native belle—
Some "hooch" I gave to a siwash brave who
swore that he wouldn't tell.

At least they *say* that I did it. It's so in the town
report.
All that I can recall is a night of revel and
sport,
When I woke with a "head" in the guard-room,
and they dragged me sick into court.

And the O. C. said: "You are guilty," and I said
never a word;
For, hang it, you see I couldn't—I didn't know
what had occurred,
And, under the circumstances, denial would be
absurd.

But the one that cooked my bacon was Grubbe,
of the City Patrol.
He fagged for my room at Eton, and didn't I
devil his soul!
And now he is getting even, landing me down in
the hole.

Plugging away on the wood-pile; doing chores round the square.
There goes an officer's lady—gives me a haughty stare—
Me that's an earl's own nephew—that is the hardest to bear.

To think of the poor old mater awaiting her prodigal son.
Tho' I broke her heart with my folly, I was always the white-haired one.
(That fatted calf that they're cooking will surely be overdone.)

I'll go back and yarn to the Bishop; I'll dance with the village belle;
I'll hand round tea to the ladies, and everything will be well.
Where I have been won't matter; what I have seen I won't tell.

I'll soar to their ken like a comet. They'll see me with never a stain;
But will they reform me?—far from it. We pay for our pleasure with pain;
But the dog will return to his vomit, the hog to his wallow again.

I've chewed on the rind of creation, and bitter
I've tasted the same;
Stacked up against hell and damnation, I've managed to stay in the game;
I've had my moments of sorrow; I've had my seasons of shame.

That's past; when one's nature's a cracked one, it's too jolly hard to mend.
So long as the road is level, so long as I've cash to spend,
I'm bound to go to the devil, and it's all the same in the end.

The bugle is sounding for stables; the men troop off through the gloom:
An orderly laying the tables sings in the bright mess-room.
(I'll wash in the prison bucket, and brush with the prison broom.)

I'll lie in my cell and listen; I'll wish that I couldn't hear
The laugh and the chaff of the fellows swigging the canteen beer;
The nasal tone of the gramophone playing "The Bandolier."

And it seems to me, though it's misty, that night
of the flowing bowl,
That the man who potlatched the whiskey and
landed me into the hole
Was Grubbe, that unmerciful bounder, Grubbe, of the
City Patrol.

THE TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

I WILL not wash my face;
I will not brush my hair;
I "pig" around the place—
There's nobody to care.
Nothing but rock and tree;
Nothing but wood and stone.
Oh, God, it's hell to be
Alone, alone, alone!

Snow-peaks and deep-gashed draws
Corral me in a ring.
I feel as if I was
The only living thing
On all this blighted earth;
And so I frowst and shrink,
And crouching by my hearth
I hear the thoughts I think.

I think of all I miss—
  The boys I used to know;
The girls I used to kiss;
  The coin I used to blow;
The bars I used to haunt;
  The racket and the row;
The beers I didn't want
  (I wish I had 'em now).

Day after day the same,
  Only a little worse;
No one to grouch or blame—
  Oh, for a loving curse!
Oh, in the night I fear,
  Haunted by nameless things,
Just for a voice to cheer,
  Just for a hand that clings!

Faintly as from a star
  Voices come o'er the line;
Voices of ghosts afar,
  Not in this world of mine;
Lives in whose loom I grope;
  Words in whose weft I hear
Eager the thrill of hope,
  Awful the chill of fear.

I'm thinking out aloud ;
I reckon that is bad ;
(The snow is like a shroud)—
Maybe I'm going mad.
Say ! wouldn't that be tough ?
This awful hush that hugs
And chokes one is enough
To make a man go "bugs."

There's not a thing to do ;
I cannot sleep at night ;
No wonder I'm so blue ;
Oh, for a friendly fight !
The din and rush of strife ;
A music-hall aglow ;
A crowd, a city, life—
Dear God, I miss it so !

Here, you have moped enough !
Brace up and play the game !
But say, it's awful tough—
Day after day the same
(I've said that twice, I bet).
Well, there's not much to say.
I wish I had a pet,
Or something I could play.

Cheer up! don't get so glum
And sick of everything;
The worst is yet to come;
God help you till the Spring.
God shield you from the Fear;
Teach you to laugh, not moan
Ha! ha! it sounds so queer—
Alone, alone, alone!

THE WOOD-CUTTER

The sky is like an envelope,
One of those blue official things;
And, sealing it, to mock our hope,
The moon, a silver wafer, clings.
What shall we find when death gives leave
To read—our sentence or reprieve?

I'm holding it down on God's scrap-pile, up on
the fag-end of earth;
O'er me a menace of mountains, a river that
grits at my feet;
Face to face with my soul-self, weighing my life
at its worth;
Wondering what I was made for, here in my
last retreat.

Last! Ah, yes, it's the finish. Have ever you
heard a man cry?
(Sobs that rake him and rend him, right from
the base of the chest.)

That's how I've cried, oh, so often; and now that my tears are dry,
I sit in the desolate quiet and wait for the infinite Rest.

Rest! Well, it's restful around me; it's quiet clean to the core.
The mountains pose in their ermine, in golden the hills are clad;
The big, blue, silt-freighted Yukon seethes by my cabin door,
And I think it's only the river that keeps me from going mad.

By day it's a ruthless monster, a callous, insatiate thing,
With oily bubble and eddy, with sudden swirling of breast;
By night it's a writhing Titan, sullenly murmuring,
Ever and ever goaded, and ever crying for rest.

It cries for its human tribute, but me it will never drown.
I've learned the lore of my river; my river obeys me well.

I hew and I launch my cordwood, and raft it to Dawson town,
Where wood means wine and women, and, incidentally, hell.

Hell and the anguish thereafter. Here as I sit alone
I'd give the life I have left me to lighten some load of care :
(The bitterest part of the bitter is being denied to atone ;
Lips that have mocked at Heaven lend themselves ill to prayer.)

Impotent as a beetle pierced on the needle of Fate ;
A wretch in a cosmic death-cell, peaks for my prison bars ;
'Whelmed by a world stupendous, lonely and listless I wait,
Drowned in a sea of silence, strewn with confetti of stars.

See! from far up the valley a rapier pierces the night,
The white search-ray of a steamer. Swiftly, serenely it nears ;

A proud, white, alien presence, a glittering galley of light,
Confident-poised, triumphant, freighted with hopes and fears.

I look as one looks on a vision; I see it pulsating by;
I glimpse joy-radiant faces; I hear the thresh of the wheel.
Hoof-like my heart beats a moment; then silence swoops from the sky.
Darkness is piled upon darkness. God only knows how I feel.

Maybe you've seen me sometimes; maybe you've pitied me then—
The lonely waif of the wood-camp, here by my cabin door.
Some day you'll look and see not; futile and outcast of men,
I shall be far from your pity, resting forevermore.

My life was a problem in ciphers, a weary and profitless sum.
Slipshod and stupid I worked it, dazed by negation and doubt.
Ciphers the total confronts me. Oh, Death, with thy moistened thumb,
Stoop like a petulant schoolboy, wipe me forever out!

THE SONG OF THE MOUTH-ORGAN

(With apologies to the singer of the "Song of the Banjo")

I'm a homely little bit of tin and bone ;
I'm beloved by the Legion of the Lost ;
I haven't got a "vox humana" tone,
And a dime or two will satisfy my cost.
I don't attempt your high-falutin' flights ;
I am more or less uncertain on the key ;
But I tell you, boys, there's lots and lots of nights
When you've taken mighty comfort out of me.

I weigh an ounce or two, and I'm so small
You can pack me in the pocket of your vest ;
And when at night so wearily you crawl
Into your bunk and stretch your limbs to rest,
You take me out and play me soft and low,
The simple songs that trouble your heartstrings ;
The tunes you used to fancy long ago,
Before you made a rotten mess of things.

Then a dreamy look will come into your eyes,
And you break off in the middle of a note;
And then, with just the dreariest of sighs,
You drop me in the pocket of your coat.
But somehow I have bucked you up a bit;
And, as you turn around and face the wall,
You don't feel quite so spineless and unfit—
You're not so bad a fellow after all.

Do you recollect the bitter Arctic night;
Your camp beside the canyon on the trail;
Your tent a tiny square of orange light;
The moon above consumptive-like and pale;
Your supper cooked, your little stove aglow;
You tired, but snug and happy as a child?
Then 'twas "Turkey in the Straw" till your lips were nearly raw,
And you hurled your bold defiance at the Wild.

Do you recollect the flashing, lashing pain;
The gulf of humid blackness overhead;
The lightning making rapiers of the rain;
The cattle-horns like candles of the dead;
You sitting on your bronco there alone,
In your slicker, saddle-sore and sick with cold?
Do you think the silent herd did not hear "The Mocking Bird,"
Or relish "Silver Threads among the Gold"?

Do you recollect the wild Magellan coast ;
The head-winds and the icy, roaring seas ;
The nights you thought that everything was lost ;
The days you toiled in water to your knees ;
The frozen ratlines shrieking in the gale ;
The hissing steeps and gulfs of livid foam :
When you cheered your messmates nine with "Ben Bolt" and "Clementine,"
And "Dixie Land" and "Seeing Nellie Home"?

Let the jammy banjo voice the Younger Son,
Who waits for his remittance to arrive ;
I represent the grimy, gritty one,
Who sweats his bones to keep himself alive ;
Who's up against the real thing from his birth ;
Whose heritage is hard and bitter toil ;
I voice the weary, smeary ones of earth,
The helots of the sea and of the soil.

I'm the Steinway of strange mischief and mischance ;
I'm the Stradivarius of blank defeat ;
In the down-world, when the devil leads the dance,
I am simply and symbolically meet ;
I'm the irrepressive spirit of mankind ;
I'm the small boy playing knuckle down with Death ;

At the end of all things known, where God's
rubbish-heap is thrown,
I shrill impudent triumph at a breath.

I'm a humble little bit of tin and horn;
I'm a byword, I'm a plaything, I'm a jest;
The virtuoso looks on me with scorn;
But there's times when I am better than the
best.
Ask the stoker and the sailor of the sea;
Ask the mucker and the hewer of the pine;
Ask the herder of the plain, ask the gleaner of the
grain—
There's a lowly, loving kingdom—and it's mine.

THE TRAIL OF NINETY-EIGHT

I.

GOLD! We leapt from our benches. Gold! We sprang from our stools.
Gold! We wheeled in the furrow, fired with the faith of fools.
Fearless, unfound, unfitted, far from the night and the cold,
Heard we the clarion summons, followed the master-lure—Gold!

Men from the sands of the Sunland; men from the woods of the West;
Men from the farms and the cities, into the Northland we pressed.
Graybeards and striplings and women, good men and bad men and bold,
Leaving our homes and our loved ones, crying exultantly—"Gold!"

Never was seen such an army, pitiful, futile, unfit ;
Never was seen such a spirit, manifold courage and grit ;
Never has been such a cohort under one banner unrolled
As surged to the ragged-edged Arctic, urged by the arch-tempter—Gold.

"Farewell !" we cried to our dearests ; little we cared for their tears.
"Farewell !" we cried to the humdrum and the yoke of the hireling years ;
Just like a pack of school-boys, and the big crowd cheered us goodbye.
Never were hearts so uplifted, never were hopes so high.

The spectral shores flitted past us, and every whirl of the screw
Hurled us nearer to fortune, and ever we planned what we'd do—
Do with the gold when we got it—big, shiny nuggets like plums,
There in the sand of the river, gouging it out with our thumbs.

And one man wanted a castle, another a racing stud ;
A third would cruise in a palace yacht like a red-necked prince of blood.
And so we dreamed and we vaunted, millionaires to a man,
Leaping to wealth in our visions long ere the trail began.

II.

We landed in wind-swept Skagway. We joined the weltering mass,
Clamouring over their outfits, waiting to climb the Pass.
We tightened our girths and our pack-straps ; we linked on the Human Chain,
Struggling up to the summit, where every step was a pain.

Gone was the joy of our faces, grim and haggard and pale ;
The heedless mirth of the shipboard was changed to the care of the trail.
We flung ourselves in the struggle, packing our grub in relays,
Step by step to the summit in the bale of the winter days.

Floundering deep in the sump-holes, stumbling
out again;
Crying with cold and weakness, crazy with fear
and pain.
Then from the depths of our travail, ere our
spirits were broke,
Grim, tenacious and savage, the lust of the trail
awoke.

"Klondike or bust!" rang the slogan; every man
for his own.
Oh, how we flogged the horses, staggering skin
and bone!
Oh, how we cursed their weakness, anguish they
could not tell,
Breaking their hearts in our passion, lashing them
on till they fell!

For grub meant gold to our thinking, and all that
could walk must pack;
The sheep for the shambles stumbled, each with
a load on its back;
And even the swine were burdened, and grunted
and squealed and rolled,
And men went mad in the moment, huskily
clamouring "Gold!"

Oh, we were brutes and devils, goaded by lust and fear!
Our eyes were strained to the summit; the weaklings dropped to the rear,
Falling in heaps by the trail-side, heart-broken, limp and wan;
But the gaps closed up in an instant, and heedless the chain went on.

Never will I forget it, there on the mountain face,
Antlike, men with their burdens, clinging in icy space;
Dogged, determined and dauntless, cruel and callous and cold,
Cursing, blaspheming, reviling, and ever that battlecry—"Gold!"

Thus toiled we, the army of fortune, in hunger and hope and despair,
Till glacier, mountain and forest vanished, and, radiantly fair,
There at our feet lay Lake Bennett, and down to its welcome we ran:
The trail of the land was over, the trail of the water began.

III.

We built our boats and we launched them.
Never has been such a fleet;
A packing-case for a bottom, a mackinaw for a
sheet.
Shapeless, grotesque, lopsided, flimsy, makeshift
and crude,
Each man after his fashion builded as best he
could.

Each man worked like a demon, as prow to
rudder we raced;
The winds of the Wild cried "Hurry!" the voice
of the waters, "Haste!"
We hated those driving before us; we dreaded
those pressing behind;
We cursed the slow current that bore us; we
prayed to the God of the wind.

Spring! and the hillsides flourished, vivid in
jewelled green;
Spring! and our hearts' blood nourished envy and
hatred and spleen.
Little cared we for the Spring-birth; much cared
we to get on—
Stake in the Great White Channel, stake ere the
best be gone.

The greed of the gold possessed us; pity and love were forgot;
Covetous visions obsessed us; brother with brother fought.
Partner with partner wrangled, each one claiming his due;
Wrangled and halved their outfits, sawing their boats in two.

Thuswise we voyaged Lake Bennett, Tagish, then Windy Arm,
Sinister, savage and baleful, boding us hate and harm.
Many a scow was shattered there on that iron shore;
Many a heart was broken straining at sweep and oar.

We roused Lake Marsh with a chorus, we drifted many a mile;
There was the canyon before us—cave-like its dark defile;
The shores swept faster and faster; the river narrowed to wrath;
Waters that hissed disaster reared upright in our path.

Beneath us the green tumult churning, above us
the cavernous gloom ;
Around us, swift twisting and turning, the
black, sullen walls of a tomb.
We spun like a chip in a mill-race ; our hearts
hammered under the test ;
Then—oh, the relief on each chill face!—we
soared into sunlight and rest.

Hand sought for hand on the instant. Cried
we, "Our troubles are o'er!"
Then, like a rumble of thunder, heard we a
canorous roar.
Leaping and boiling and seething, saw we a
cauldron afume ;
There was the rage of the rapids, there was
the menace of doom.

The river springs like a racer, sweeps through
a gash in the rock ;
Butts at the boulder-ribbed bottom, staggers and
rears at the shock ;
Leaps like a terrified monster, writhes in its fury
and pain ;
Then with the crash of a demon springs to the
onset again.

Dared we that ravening terror ; heard we its din
in our ears ;
Called on the Gods of our fathers, juggled forlorn
with our fears ;
Sank to our waists in its fury, tossed to the sky
like a fleece ;
Then, when our dread was the greatest, crashed
into safety and peace.

But what of the others that followed, losing their
boats by the score ?
Well could we see them and hear them, strung
down that desolate shore.
What of the poor souls that perished ? Little of
them shall be said—
On to the Golden Valley, pause not to bury
the dead.

Then there were days of drifting, breezes soft
as a sigh ;
Night trailed her robe of jewels over the floor
of the sky.
The moonlit stream was a python, silver, sinuous,
vast,
That writhed on a shroud of velvet—well, it
was done at last.

There were the tents of Dawson, there the scar
of the slide;
Swiftly we poled o'er the shallows, swiftly leapt
o'er the side.
Fires fringed the mouth of Bonanza; sunset
gilded the dome;
The test of the trail was over—thank God,
thank God, we were Home!

THE BALLAD OF GUM-BOOT BEN

He was an old prospector with a vision bleared and dim.
He asked me for a grubstake, and the same I gave to him.
He hinted of a hidden trove, and when I made so bold
To question his veracity, this is the tale he told.

"I do not seek the copper streak, nor yet the yellow dust;
I am not fain for sake of gain to irk the frozen crust;
Let fellows gross find gilded dross, far other is my mark;
Oh, gentle youth, this is the truth—I go to seek the Ark.

"I prospected the Pelly bed, I prospected the White;
The Nordenscold for love of gold I piked from morn till night;

Afar and near for many a year I led the wild stampede,
Until I guessed that all my quest was vanity and greed.

"Then came I to a land I knew no man had ever seen,
A haggard land, forlornly spanned by mountains lank and lean;
The nitchies said 'twas full of dread, of smoke and fiery breath,
And no man dare put foot in there for fear of pain and death.

"But I was made all unafraid, so, careless and alone,
Day after day I made my way into that land unknown;
Night after night by camp-fire light I crouched in lonely thought;
Oh, gentle youth, this is the truth—I knew not what I sought.

"I rose at dawn; I wandered on. 'Tis somewhat fine and grand
To be alone and hold your own in God's vast awesome land;

Come woe or weal, 'tis fine to feel a hundred miles between
The trails you dare and pathways where the feet of men have been.

"And so it fell on me a spell of wander-lust was cast.
The land was still and strange and chill, and cavernous and vast;
And sad and dead, and dull as lead, the valleys sought the snows;
And far and wide on every side the ashen peaks arose.

"The moon was like a silent spike that pierced the sky right through;
The small stars popped and winked and hopped in vastitudes of blue;
And unto me for company came creatures of the shade,
And formed in rings and whispered things that made me half afraid.

"And strange though be, 'twas borne on me that land had lived of old,
And men had crept and slain and slept where now they toiled for gold;

Through jungles dim the mammoth grim had
sought the oozy fen,
And on his track, all bent of back, had crawled
the hairy men.

"And furthermore, strange deeds of yore in this
dead place were done.
They haunted me, as wild and free I roamed
from sun to sun;
Until I came where sudden flame uplit a terraced
height,
A regnant peak that seemed to seek the coronal
of night.

"I scaled the peak; my heart was weak, yet on
and on I pressed.
Skyward I strained until I gained its dazzling
silver crest;
And there I found, with all around a world
supine and stark,
Swept clean of snow, a flat plateau, and on it
lay—the Ark.

"Yes, there, I knew, by two and two the beasts
did disembark,
And so in haste I ran and traced in letters on
the Ark

My human name—Ben Smith's the same. And
now I want to float
A syndicate to haul and freight to town that
noble boat."

I met him later in a bar and made a gay remark
Anent an ancient miner and an option on the Ark.
He gazed at me reproachfully, as only topers can;
But what he said I can't repeat—he was a bad old
man.

CLANCY OF THE MOUNTED POLICE

In the little Crimson Manual it's written plain and clear
That who would wear the scarlet coat shall say goodbye to fear;
Shall be a guardian of the right, a sleuth-hound of the trail—
In the little Crimson Manual there's no such word as "fail"—
Shall follow on though heavens fall, or hell's top-turrets freeze,
Half round the world, if need there be, on bleeding hands and knees.
It's duty, duty, first and last, the Crimson Manual saith;
The Scarlet Rider makes reply: "It's duty—to the death."
And so they sweep the solitudes, free men from all the earth;

And so they sentinel the woods, the wilds that know their worth ;
And so they scour the startled plains and mock at hurt and pain,
And read their Crimson Manual, and find their duty plain.
Knights of the lists of unrenown, born of the frontier's need,
Disdainful of the spoken word, exultant in the deed ;
Unconscious heroes of the waste, proud players of the game,
Props of the power behind the throne, upholders of the name :
For thus the Great White Chief hath said, " In all my lands be peace,"
And to maintain his word he gave his West the Scarlet Police.

Livid-lipped was the valley, still as the grave of God ;
Misty shadows of mountain thinned into mists of cloud ;
Corpselike and stark was the land, with a quiet that crushed and awed,
And the stars of the weird sub-arctic glimmered over its shroud.

Deep in the trench of the valley two men stationed the Post,
Seymour and Clancy the reckless, fresh from the long patrol;
Seymour, the sergeant, and Clancy—Clancy who made his boast
He could cinch like a bronco the Northland, and cling to the prongs of the Pole.

Two lone men on detachment, standing for law on the trail;
Undismayed in the vastness, wise with the wisdom of old—
Out of the night hailed a half-breed telling a pitiful tale,
"White man starving and crazy on the banks of the Nordenscold."

Up sprang the red-haired Clancy, lean and eager of eye;
Loaded the long toboggan, strapped each dog at its post;
Whirled his lash at the leader; then, with a whoop and a cry,
Into the Great White Silence faded away like a ghost.

The clouds were a misty shadow, the hills were
a shadowy mist;
Sunless, voiceless and pulseless, the day was a
dream of woe;
Through the ice-rifts the river smoked and
bubbled and hissed;
Behind was a trail fresh broken, in front
the untrodden snow.

Ahead of the dogs ploughed Clancy, haloed by
steaming breath;
Through peril of open water, through ache of
insensate cold;
Up rivers wantonly winding in a land affianced
to death,
Till he came to a cowering cabin on the
banks of the Nordenscold.

Then Clancy loosed his revolver, and he strode
through the open door;
And there was the man he sought for, crouch-
ing beside the fire;
The hair of his beard was singeing, the frost
on his back was hoar,
And ever he crooned and chanted as if he
never would tire:—

"I panned and I panned in the shiny sand, and
I sniped on the river bar;
But I know, I know, that it's down below that
the golden treasures are;
So I'll wait and wait till the floods abate, and I'll
sink a shaft once more,
And I'd like to bet that I'll go home yet with a brass
band playing before."

He was nigh as thin as a sliver, and he whined
like a Moose-hide cur;
So Clancy clothed him and nursed him as a
mother nurses a child;
Lifted him on the toboggan, wrapped him in
robes of fur,
Then with the dogs sore straining started to
face the Wild.

Said the Wild, "I will crush this Clancy, so
fearless and insolent;
For him will I loose my fury, and blind and
buffet and beat;
Pile up my snows to stay him; then when his
strength is spent,
Leap on him from my ambush and crush him
under my feet.

"Him will I ring with my silence, compass him with my cold;
Closer and closer clutch him unto mine icy breast;
Buffet him with my blizzards, deep in my snows enfold,
Claiming his life as my tribute, giving my wolves the rest."

Clancy crawled through the vastness; o'er him the hate of the Wild;
Full on his face fell the blizzard; cheering his huskies he ran;
Fighting, fierce-hearted and tireless, snows that drifted and piled,
With ever and ever behind him singing the crazy man.

"*Sing hey, sing ho, for the ice and snow,*
And a heart that's ever merry;
Let us trim and square with a lover's care
(For why should a man be sorry?)
A grave deep, deep, with the moon a-peep,
A grave in the frozen mould.
Sing hey, sing ho, for the winds that blow,
And a grave deep down in the ice and snow,
A grave in the land of gold."

Day after day of darkness, the whirl of the seething snows ;
Day after day of blindness, the swoop of the stinging blast ;
On through a blur of fury the swing of staggering blows ;
On through a world of turmoil, empty, inane and vast.

Night with its writhing storm-whirl, night despairingly black ;
Night with its hours of terror, numb and endlessly long ;
Night with its weary waiting, fighting the shadows back,
And ever the crouching madman singing his crazy song.

Cold with its creeping terror, cold with its sudden clinch ;
Cold so utter you wonder if 'twill ever again be warm ;
Clancy grinned as he shuddered, "Surely it isn't a cinch
Being wet-nurse to a looney in the teeth of an arctic storm."

The blizzard passed and the dawn broke, knife-edged and crystal clear;
The sky was a blue-domed iceberg, sunshine outlawed away;
Ever by snowslide and ice-rip haunted and hovered the Fear;
Ever the Wild malignant poised and panted to slay.

The lead-dog freezes in harness—cut him out of the team!
The lung of the wheel-dog's bleeding—shoot him and let him lie!
On and on with the others—lash them until they scream!
"Pull for your lives, you devils! On! To halt is to die."

There in the frozen vastness Clancy fought with his foes;
The ache of the stiffened fingers, the cut of the snowshoe thong;
Cheeks black-raw through the hood-flap, eyes that tingled and closed,
And ever to urge and cheer him quavered the madman's song.

Colder it grew and colder, till the last heat left the earth,
And there in the great stark stillness the bale fires glinted and gleamed,
And the Wild all around exulted and shook with a devilish mirth,
And life was far and forgotten, the ghost of a joy once dreamed.

Death! And one who defied it, a man of the Mounted Police;
Fought it there to a standstill long after hope was gone;
Grinned through his bitter anguish, fought without let or cease,
Suffering, straining, striving, stumbling, struggling on.

Till the dogs lay down in their traces, and rose and staggered and fell;
Till the eyes of him dimmed with shadows, and the trail was so hard to see;
Till the Wild howled out triumphant, and the world was a frozen hell—
Then said Constable Clancy: "I guess that it's up to me."

Far down the trail they saw him, and his hands they were blanched like bone;
His face was a blackened horror, from his eyelids the salt rheum ran;
His feet he was lifting strangely, as if they were made of stone,
But safe in his arms and sleeping he carried the crazy man.

So Clancy got into Barracks, and the boys made rather a scene;
And the O. C. called him a hero, and was nice as a man could be;
But Clancy gazed down his trousers at the place where his toes had been,
And then he howled like a husky, and sang in a shaky key:—

"*When I go back to the old love that's true to the finger-tips,*
I'll say: 'Here's bushels of gold, love,' and I'll kiss my girl on the lips;
'It's yours to have and to hold, love.' It's the proud, proud boy I'll be,
When I go back to the old love that's waited so long for me."

LOST

"Black is the sky, but the land is white—
(O the wind, the snow and the storm!)—
Father, where is our boy to-night?
Pray to God he is safe and warm."

"Mother, mother, why should you fear
Safe is he, and the Arctic moon
Over his cabin shines so clear—
Rest and sleep, 'twill be morning soon."

"It's getting dark awful sudden. Say, this is mighty queer!
Where in the world have I got to? It's still and black as a tomb.
I reckoned the camp was yonder, I figured the trail was here—
Nothing! Just draw and valley packed with quiet and gloom;

Snow that comes down like feathers, thick and
gobby and gray ;
Night that looks spiteful ugly—seems that I've
lost my way.

"The cold's got an edge like a jackknife—it
must be forty below ;
Leastways that's what it seems like—it cuts so
fierce to the bone.
The wind's getting real ferocious ; it's heaving and
whirling the snow ;
It shrieks with a howl of fury, it dies away to
a moan ;
Its arms sweep round like a banshee's, swift and
icily white,
And buffet and blind and beat me. Lord ! it's
a hell of a night.

"I'm all tangled up in a blizzard. There's only
one thing to do—
Keep on moving and moving ; it's death, it's
death if I rest.
Oh, God ! if I see the morning, if only I struggle
through,
I'll say the prayers I've forgotten since I lay
on my mother's breast.
I seem going round in a circle ; maybe the camp
is near.

Say! did somebody holler? Was it a light I saw?
Or was it only a notion? I'll shout, and maybe they'll hear—
No! the wind only drowns me—shout till my throat is raw.

"The boys are all round the camp-fire wondering when I'll be back.
They'll soon be starting to seek me; they'll scarcely wait for the light.
What will they find, I wonder, when they come to the end of my track—
A hand stuck out of a snowdrift, frozen and stiff and white.
That's what they'll strike, I reckon; that's how they'll find their pard,
A pie-faced corpse in a snowbank—curse you, don't be a fool!
Play the game to the finish; bet on your very last card;
Nerve yourself for the struggle. Oh, you coward, keep cool!

"I'm going to lick this blizzard; I'm going to live the night.

It can't down me with its bluster—I'm not the
kind to be beat.
On hands and knees will I buck it ; with every
breath will I fight ;
It's life, it's life that I fight for—never it seemed
so sweet.
I know that my face is frozen ; my hands are
numblike and dead ;
But oh, my feet keep a-moving, heavy and hard
and slow ;
They're trying to kill me, kill me, the night that's
black overhead,
The wind that cuts like a razor, the whipcord
lash of the snow.
Keep a-moving, a-moving ; don't, don't stumble,
you fool !
Curse this snow that's a-piling a-purpose to
block my way.
It's heavy as gold in the rocker, it's white and
fleecy as wool ;
It's soft as a bed of feathers, it's warm as a
stack of hay.
Curse on my feet that slip so, my poor tired,
stumbling feet—
I guess they're a job for the surgeon, they feel
so queerlike to lift—

I'll rest them just for a moment—oh, but to rest is sweet!
The awful wind cannot get me, deep, deep down in the drift."

"*Father, a bitter cry I heard,*
Out of the night so dark and wild.
Why is my heart so strangely stirred?
'Twas like the voice of our erring child."

"*Mother, mother, you only heard*
A waterfowl in the locked lagoon—
Out of the night a wounded bird—
Rest and sleep, 'twill be morning soon."

Who is it talks of sleeping? I'll swear that somebody shook
Me hard by the arm for a moment, but how on earth could it be?
See how my feet are moving—awfully funny they look—
Moving as if they belonged to a some one that wasn't me.
The wind down the night's long alley bowls me down like a pin;
I stagger and fall and stagger, crawl arm-deep in the snow.

Beaten back to my corner, how can I hope to win?
And there is the blizzard waiting to give me the knockout blow.

Oh, I'm so warm and sleepy! No more hunger and pain.
Just to rest for a moment; was ever rest such a joy?
Ha! what was that I'll swear it, somebody shook me again;
Somebody seemed to whisper: "Fight to the last, my boy."
Fight! That's right, I must struggle. I know that to rest means death;
Death, but then what does death mean?—ease from a world of strife.
Life has been none too pleasant; yet with my failing breath
Still and still must I struggle, fight for the gift of life.

. . . . . .

Seems that I must be dreaming! Here is the old home trail;
Yonder a light is gleaming; oh, I know it so well!

The air is scented with clover; the cattle wait
by the rail;
Father is through with the milking; there goes
the supper-bell.

. . . . . .

Mother, your boy is crying, out in the night and
cold;
Let me in and forgive me, I'll never be bad
any more:
I'm, oh, so sick and so sorry: please, dear mother,
don't scold—
It's just your boy, and he wants you. . . .
Mother, open the door. . . .

"*Father, father, I saw a face*
Pressed just now to the window-pane!
Oh, it gazed for a moment's space,
Wild and wan, and was gone again!"

"*Mother, mother, you saw the snow*
Drifted down from the maple-tree
(*Oh, the wind that is sobbing so!*
Weary and worn and old are we)—
Only the snow and a wounded loon—
Rest and sleep, 'twill be morning soon."

L'ENVOI

We talked of yesteryears, of trails and treasure,
Of men who played the game and lost or won;
Of mad stampedes, of toil beyond all measure,
Of camp-fire comfort when the day was done.
We talked of sullen nights by moon-dogs haunted,
Of bird and beast and tree, of rod and gun;
Of boat and tent, of hunting-trip enchanted
Beneath the wonder of the midnight sun;
Of bloody-footed dogs that gnawed the traces,
Of prisoned seas, wind-lashed and winter-locked.
The ice-grey dawn was pale upon our faces,
Yet still we filled the cup and still we talked.

The city street was dimmed. We saw the glitter
Of moon-picked brilliants on the virgin snow,
And down the drifted canyon heard the bitter,
Relentless slogan of the winds of woe.
The city was forgot, and, parka-skirted,
We trod that leagueless land that once we knew;

We saw stream past, down valleys glacier-girted,
The wolf-worn legions of the caribou;
We smoked our pipes, o'er scenes of triumph dwelling;
Of deeds of daring, dire defeats, we talked;
And other tales that lost not in the telling,
Ere to our beds uncertainly we walked.

And so, dear friends, in gentler valleys roaming,
Perhaps, when on my printed page you look,
Your fancies by the firelight may go homing
To that lone land that haply you forsook.
And if perchance you hear the silence calling,
The frozen music of star-yearning heights,
Or, dreaming, see the seines of silver trawling
Across the sky's abyss on vasty nights,
You may recall that sweep of savage splendour,
That land that measures each man at his worth,
And feel in memory, half fierce, half tender,
The brotherhood of men that know the North.

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